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Polite form.—Polite form is a special third-person singular or plural form of the verb attached to every paradigm. There is an ordinary third-person form, and so linguists distinguish between the two by labeling the polite form the "fourth person." Since the polite form, though it can be used in direct address, is essentially a third-person form, it necessarily injects a note of indirection into any conversation in which it is employed.

The presence of an avoided person, if he is within hearing, must be discreetly ignored, and direct address to him is ordinarily ruled out except for moments of crisis. At these times it is the polite form of speech which passes between the two. Whenever one avoidance affinity speaks of another, and this is much more common, the reference must be couched in the fourth-person form.

Since the common set of terms for affinal relatives is derived from the verb "to carry a burden," and since every paradigm has a fourth-person form as well as a regular third-person form, it follows that there are two ways of saying "affinity who has married into my family"—one polite and one ordinary—and two ways of saying "affinity into whose family I have married." The two terms of this set which are expressed in the fourth-person form are the ones used to denominate affinities who are avoided or to address those to whom polite form is used. The other pair is used of or to affinities with whom neither avoidance nor polite form has been inaugurated.

There are two other words in use to designate affinal relatives with whom avoidance or polite-form usages have been instituted. They, too, are taken from verbs and are fourth-person forms. Unlike the words of the other set, these two forms indicate the sex of the person to whom they are addressed. The term which singles out the male to whom polite form or avoidance is owed literally means "he who is old" and in a primary sense has the connotation of father-in-law. The other, in use to or of women of a comparable category and carrying the primary meaning of mother-in-law, can be translated as "she who has become old." The use of the two affinity systems overlaps. For instance, the

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602 195 father-in-law can be referred to by the son-in-law as "one for whom I carry burdens" and also as "he who is old."

[193] The question of whether polite form is to be required and the mode of notification are the business of the woman's relatives.

As soon as the relatives of the girl heard about it, those who intended to do so started to use the polite form the next time they saw me. They told me that I should use the polite form to them, and in that very sentence they used it themselves. So they really used it first.

Polite form begins immediately after marriage. Sometimes the individual tells you to use the polite form; sometimes he or she just uses it to you, and you must use it in return.

Perfect decorum must be maintained when two "who are ashamed in words" are together:

You can't pass water, defecate, or use smutty language when anyone to whom you use polite form is around. If one of them is in an embarrassing or ridiculous position, you cannot laugh at him but must leave the place immediately. You have to be careful of your language, too, when someone like this is around.

[551] Ordinarily, names may be used in speaking of absent persons, but a stricter usage is observed by a polite-form affinity:

You don't call the name of a man to whom you use polite form. If you do have to mention his name, you have to add something, as "the one who is known as C." or "the one who is called C." Others can use his name before you though. Usually in referring to him you just say "the one who is an affinity to me."

602 195 596 It is evident that these observances are related to that same economic solidarity which exists between avoidance relatives:

I feel that if I needed some service or property I could ask it of someone to whom I used the polite form. I'd be sure of getting it. If I were having a girl go [476] through the puberty ceremony, I might ask these people for help, and a man helps his wife's relatives meet the expense of a ceremony which his wife's relatives are putting on. You can take property privileges with anyone to whom you use [426] the polite form. You can borrow property from them freely, for you know they will never say anything to you that is disrespectful. You have more rights in this respect than you would with your own family.

602 195 578 But in spite of convention, polite form, like avoidance, often masks repressed dislikes:

Some people, when they get drunk, will fight their own fathers. And they [203] don't care if someone they have to be polite to tries to handle them. Even though they are supposed to be ashamed before a person, that isn't going to hold them down when they're drunk. Sometimes they don't like a person they are ashamed before in words, and then, when they are drunk, it comes out.